



ASIA

## Key role of employability in choice of foreign university

Yojana Sharma 08 March 2019

International students from several Asian countries, including India and China, who are looking to choose a university abroad have become more focused on employment prospects in choosing a subject, university and the country of study abroad.

According to a new global comparison report on international student employment outcomes and international student satisfaction published by Australian-based student-university-alumni network platform Cturtle, which also produces international student satisfaction data and the International Alumni Job Network, students from eight Asian countries are prioritising career issues in choosing a university abroad.

“We are starting to see interesting trends that show how important employability is when it comes to recommending the country or recommending the university abroad to future students,” says Shane Dillon, co-founder and group CEO of Cturtle. Sea turtle is the nickname used in China for international students who return home after graduation.

“We get a lot of enquiries asking for international study advice based on employment. We hadn’t seen it before,” Dillon says.

More than 81% of some 10,000 students surveyed from China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam said they wanted to study abroad to improve career opportunities, or to pursue a specific career, according to Cturtle’s *International Student Employment Outcomes and Satisfaction Report 2019*.

“With the future of work so uncertain, a lot of students are picking a course which they think will give them a greater advantage once they enter the competitive employment stage,” notes Dillon.

“Five of the top 10 reasons that students and alumni recommend their university to others are related to employability and seven of the top 10 reasons for recommending the country are related to employability,” he says, adding that the job market “is now so competitive and there are more and more international students going through that system so that their uniqueness and competitive edge is dulling. Employability then becomes a really critical issue.”

Employability has also become important because of the large amounts invested in education abroad by international students.

### **Poor university response**

However, “universities do not really respond to this,” Dillon says. Only four or five out of 10 international students were satisfied with their university’s career support, according to the survey findings, with lower satisfaction in Australia and the United Kingdom compared to the United States and Europe.

Universities in countries like the US, Australia and Canada are failing to help international students improve their employment prospects, concentrating mainly on employability for their local students rather than for international students, he adds.

“I see a huge gap. Our research has shown that four in five international students did not get access to internships” in the host country, Dillon says. In countries like the UK and Australia only 17% of international students had access to internship offerings. In Europe it was 37% of international students.

Students from Singapore, Hong Kong, India and Malaysia were most likely to participate in internship programmes as part of their studies abroad, with 83% of Singaporeans and 71% of Indians saying they had done so – an indication of the importance students place on such internships if offered.

In response to the findings, Dillon said: “We are working with universities to improve internships overseas that can be course accredited.”

The vast majority of international students got their first job in their country of origin. This was highest for the UK at 86% and lowest for Canada at 65% – findings which tend to reflect the more generous availability of post-study work visas in Canada compared to the scrapping of such visas in the UK some years ago.

International students in Canada were also more likely to say they had equal opportunities with local students in the competition for jobs – with 44% reporting this. In the UK just 24% felt they had equal opportunities with local students, compared with 28% in Australia and 35% in the US.

Two-thirds of international students who studied in the US got their first job there, while for Australia it was 83%.

### **Job search**

Half of international students took part-time jobs while studying overseas, mostly Indian and Vietnamese students. Alumni from Australia were most likely to say they did not find the universities supportive with their part-time job search.

Often this was related to the type of studies they undertook – science and engineering students were less likely to take up part-time work, with time constraints likely being a factor.

Only around a quarter to a third of the students surveyed said universities supported students in finding part-time work while studying, although this rose to 57% in Europe and 53% in the US when part-time work was related to studies.

Often job prospects feed into satisfaction with study overseas.

While the international experience of alumni was positive and quite similar whether they had studied in the US, Canada, New Zealand, Europe, Australia or the UK, alumni from the US, Canada and New Zealand were more satisfied with their educational return on investment.

Up to three-quarters of Canadian alumni from abroad who were surveyed were satisfied with their return on investment, compared to two-thirds of UK alumni and seven out of 10 Australian alumni.

Students from India appeared to be least satisfied with their experience of studying abroad, which may reflect job prospects when they return or in the country where they study.

International alumni who studied in the US and Europe were most likely to say their international education played an important role in their career success – with some 85% of these alumni saying this, compared to 75% for UK alumni.

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